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RESULT OF A YEAR AND A HALF WITH A SPECIAL-HELP PERIOD

The special-teacher plan has received unusual attention within the past few years. Where this plan is followed, the school authorities commonly employ a special teacher, usually of exceptional ability, to devote her time either to the retarded and the backward pupil or to the gifted child who, with extra attention given him, may be capable of passing more than one grade in one year.

There are several difficulties connected with this plan. Many school systems do not adopt it because an extra expense is involved. It is difficult to persuade a school board that the services of such a teacher are required. If persuaded of the advantages of such a teacher, the board may object to securing a highly paid teacher. A second and more vital objection to the special-teacher plan is that such a teacher does not know her pupils so intimately as does the regular room teacher and hence she may fail to appreciate the special needs or peculiarities of the children sent to her. Further, this teacher will not receive all pupils who require assistance. She may have sent to her only those who are clearly backward or capable of doing advanced work. Those on the border line are overlooked, and the regular teacher, not having a special hour assigned for giving help to her pupils, is but too inclined to feel her responsibility ended when she has sent her quota to the special teacher. Finally, the special-teacher arrangement provides no means for stimulating the timid pupil who may possess ability but who requires urging in order to measure up to his capacities. The teacher who knows him well may spur him on to undertake additional work where he could not be persuaded to venture by the special teacher.

Consideration of these objections to the special-teacher plan induced us to attempt first the introduction of a special-help period of thirty minutes daily for each grade above the third grade, to be devoted by each teacher to those of her pupils who might be benefited by it. This system involves no additional expense; it is

conducted by the teacher in charge of the room, who understands the peculiar needs and characteristics of her pupils, and it centers the teacher's attention in a most vital manner upon the progress and capacities of her pupils. Undoubtedly the striking results shown by the data given below may be traced in a large measure to the increased efficiency of the teachers resulting from the diagnosis which this requires each teacher to make of her class. If the special-help period accomplishes this one result it has justified its introduction. Further, this makes "staying after school" no longer a punishment; it is an opportunity.

A word of explanation should be said concerning the tables which follow. Before the inauguration of the special-help period the school policy had been opposed to the skipping of grades. This accounts for the absence of data in the skipping column for the year 1912-13. While skipping was not opposed in the first semester of the year 1913-14, the special-help period was not introduced until February, 1914. The tables, therefore, show the results of one and one-half years' trial of the special-help period. At the time of introducing this period the teachers were urged to give special attention to the needs of individual pupils. They were made to realize the disadvantages of the rigid graded system and our lock-step plan of progress. The special-help period was proposed as one means for overcoming these evils. As suggested above, this may account in part for the unusual results secured. On the other hand, a close supervision was exercised over the conduct of this period and the warning was constantly given teachers not to promote or to skip pupils beyond their capacities. No effort was made to tabulate results or to compare the efforts of teachers. The collection of the following data was made in connection with the city superintendent's annual report to the state superintendent, and originally for no other purpose.

It should be added that it is not the intention of this article to advocate a special-help period as a substitute for the ungraded room. The ungraded room has a peculiar function of its own. This we must retain, but extreme caution should be exercised in selecting pupils for this room.

Tables I and II indicate that as a result of the special-help period 12½ per cent of the total number of children enrolled in the

year 1914-15 were enabled to complete from one and one-half to two year's work in one year. The tables also show a marked decrease in the number of children who dropped out of school following failure to pass their grades.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF FAILURES AND PROMOTIONS IN THE THREE YEARS 1912-15 FOR THE GRADES I TO VIII INCLUSIVE

Year	Enrolled	Promoted	Failed	Percentage Failed	Skipped	Percentage Skipped
1912-13.....	1,471	1,193	278	19.1+	None	None
1913-14.....	1,562	1,332	230	14.7+	65	4.1+
1914-15.....	1,544	1,324	220	14.2+	193	12.5

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF PUPILS WHO DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL AFTER FAILURE IN THE THREE YEARS 1912-15 IN THE GRADES I TO VIII INCLUSIVE

Year	Failed	Remained in School	Dropped from School	Percentage of Total Who Dropped
1912-13.....	278	197	81	29.1+
1913-14.....	230	151	79	34.3+
1914-15.....	220	169	51	23.1+

In the *Psychological Clinic* of January, 1911, Dr. Roland P. Faulkner proposes a simple method for measuring the efficiency of a school system. This is to locate the thirteen-year-old children. If a child be normal he should be above the sixth grade at this age. While data are lacking for the year 1912-13, the comparison of the years 1913-14 and 1914-15 shows a striking improvement in the status of the thirteen-year-old pupils. In 1913-14 there were 148 pupils of thirteen years of age in the school system, of whom 86 were above the sixth grade and 62 in or below this grade. In 1914-15, out of a total of 158 children of this age 105 were above the sixth grade and 53 were in or below this grade. Upon the basis of percentage this would be 43.2+ per cent retarded thirteen-year-old pupils in 1913-14 as compared with 33.5+ per cent in 1914-15. While this is much too large a percentage of children to have as educational misfits, the special-help period seems to have done much to relieve the situation.